

**U.S. ADULT FOOD SECURITY SURVEY MODULE:  
THREE-STAGE DESIGN, WITH SCREENERS  
Economic Research Service, USDA  
July 2008**

**Revision Notes:** The food security questions in the U.S. Adult Food Security Survey Module are essentially unchanged from those in the original module first implemented in 1995.

***July 2008:***

- Wording of resource constraint in AD2 was corrected to, "...because there wasn't enough money for food" to be consistent with the intention of the September 2006 revision.

***September 2006:***

- Minor changes were introduced to standardize wording of the resource constraint in most questions to read, "...because there wasn't enough money for food."
- Question numbers were changed to be consistent with those in the revised Household Food Security Survey Module.
- User notes following the questionnaire were revised to be consistent with current practice and with new labels for ranges of food security and food insecurity introduced by USDA in 2006.

**Overview:** The U.S. Adult Food Security Survey Module is the same set of questions that is administered as the U.S. Household Food Security Survey Module to households with no child present. For many measurement purposes, the adult module can be used both for households with and without children present.

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- Advantages (compared with the 18-item household module):
  - Less respondent burden.
  - Improves comparability of food security statistics between households with and without children and among households with children in different age ranges.
  - Avoids asking questions about children's food security, which can be sensitive in some survey contexts.
- Limitations:
  - Does not provide specific information on food security of children.

**Transition Into Module (administered to all households):**

These next questions are about the food eaten in your household in the last 12 months, since (current month) of last year and whether you were able to afford the food you need.

**Optional USDA Food Sufficiency Question/Screeners: Question HH1** (This question is optional. It is not used to calculate the Adult Food Security Scale. It may be used in conjunction with income as a preliminary screener to reduce respondent burden for high income households).

HH1. [IF ONE PERSON IN HOUSEHOLD, USE "I" IN PARENTHETICALS, OTHERWISE, USE "WE."]

Which of these statements best describes the food eaten in your household in the last 12 months: —enough of the kinds of food (I/we) want to eat; —enough, but not always the kinds of food (I/we) want; —sometimes not enough to eat; or, —often not enough to eat?

- ☐ [1] Enough of the kinds of food we want to eat
- ☐ [2] Enough but not always the kinds of food we want
- ☐ [3] Sometimes not enough to eat
- ☐ [4] Often not enough to eat
- ☐ [ ] DK or Refused

**Household Stage 1: Questions HH2-HH4** (asked of all households; begin scale items).

[IF SINGLE ADULT IN HOUSEHOLD, USE "I," "MY," AND "YOU" IN PARENTHETICALS; OTHERWISE, USE "WE," "OUR," AND "YOUR HOUSEHOLD."]

HH2. Now I'm going to read you several statements that people have made about their food situation. For these statements, please tell me whether the statement was often true, sometimes true, or never true for (you/your household) in the last 12 months—that is, since last (name of current month).

The first statement is "(I/We) worried whether (my/our) food would run out before (I/we) got money to buy more." Was that often true, sometimes true, or never true for (you/your household) in the last 12 months?

- ☐ [ ] Often true
- ☐ [ ] Sometimes true
- ☐ [ ] Never true
- ☐ [ ] DK or Refused

HH3. "The food that (I/we) bought just didn't last, and (I/we) didn't have money to get more." Was that often, sometimes, or never true for (you/your household) in the last 12 months?

- ☐ [ ] Often true
- ☐ [ ] Sometimes true
- ☐ [ ] Never true
- ☐ [ ] DK or Refused

HH4. "(I/we) couldn't afford to eat balanced meals." Was that often, sometimes, or never true for (you/your household) in the last 12 months?

- ☐ [ ] Often true
- ☐ [ ] Sometimes true
- ☐ [ ] Never true
- ☐ [ ] DK or Refused

**Screener for Stage 2 Adult-Referenced Questions:** If affirmative response (i.e., "often true" or "sometimes true") to one or more of Questions HH2-HH4, OR, response [3] or [4] to question HH1 (if administered), then continue to *Adult Stage 2*; otherwise skip to *End of Adult Food Security Module*.

**NOTE:** In a sample similar to that of the general U.S. population, about 20 percent of households (45 percent of households with incomes less than 185 percent of poverty line) will pass this screen and continue to Adult Stage 2.

**Adult Stage 2: Questions AD1-AD4** (asked of households passing the screener for Stage 2 adult-referenced questions).

AD1. In the last 12 months, since last (name of current month), did (you/you or other adults in your household) ever cut the size of your meals or skip meals because there wasn't enough money for food?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No (Skip AD1a)
- ☐ DK (Skip AD1a)

AD1a. [IF YES ABOVE, ASK] How often did this happen—almost every month, some months but not every month, or in only 1 or 2 months?

- ☐ Almost every month
- ☐ Some months but not every month
- ☐ Only 1 or 2 months
- ☐ DK

AD2. In the last 12 months, did you ever eat less than you felt you should because there wasn't enough money for food?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ DK

AD3. In the last 12 months, were you every hungry but didn't eat because there wasn't enough money for food?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ DK

AD4. In the last 12 months, did you lose weight because there wasn't enough money for food?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ DK

**Screener for Stage 3 Adult-Referenced Questions:** If affirmative response to one or more of questions AD1 through AD4, then continue to *Adult Stage 3*; otherwise, skip to *End of Adult Food Security Module*.

**NOTE:** In a sample similar to that of the general U.S. population, about 8 percent of households (20 percent of households with incomes less than 185 percent of poverty line) will pass this screen and continue to Adult Stage 3.

**Adult Stage 3: Questions AD5-AD5a** (asked of households passing screener for Stage 3 adult-referenced questions).

AD5. In the last 12 months, did (you/you or other adults in your household) ever not eat for a whole day because there wasn't enough money for food?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No (Skip 12a)
- ☐ DK (Skip 12a)

AD5a. [IF YES ABOVE, ASK] How often did this happen—almost every month, some months but not every month, or in only 1 or 2 months?

- ☐ Almost every month
- ☐ Some months but not every month
- ☐ Only 1 or 2 months
- ☐ DK

**END OF ADULT FOOD SECURITY MODULE**

## User Notes

### **(1) Coding Responses and Assessing Household Adult Food Security Status:**

Following is a brief overview of how to code responses and assess household food security status based on the Adult Food Security Scale. For detailed information on these procedures, refer to the *Guide to Measuring Household Food Security, Revised 2000*, available through the ERS Food Security in the United States Briefing Room.

Responses of “yes,” “often,” “sometimes,” “almost every month,” and “some months but not every month” are coded as affirmative. The sum of affirmative responses to the 10 questions in the Adult Food Security Scale is the household’s raw score on the scale.

Food security status is assigned as follows:

- Raw score zero—High food security among adults
- Raw score 1-2—Marginal food security among adults
- Raw score 3-5—Low food security among adults
- Raw score 6-10—Very low food security among adults

For some reporting purposes, the food security status of the first two categories in combination is described as food secure and the latter two as food insecure.

**(2) Response Options:** For interviewer-administered surveys, DK (“don’t know”) and “Refused” are blind responses—that is, they are not presented as response options but marked if volunteered. For self-administered surveys, “don’t know” is presented as a response option.

**(3) Screening:** The two levels of screening for adult-referenced questions are provided for surveys in which it is considered important to reduce respondent burden. In pilot surveys intended to validate the module in a new cultural, linguistic, or survey context, screening should be avoided if possible and all questions should be administered to all respondents.

To further reduce burden for higher income respondents, a preliminary screener may be constructed using question HH1 along with a household income measure. Households with income above twice the poverty threshold AND who respond <1> to question HH1 may be skipped to the end of the module and classified as food secure. Using this preliminary screener reduces total burden in a survey with many higher income households, and the cost, in terms of accuracy in identifying food-insecure households, is not great. However, research has shown that a small proportion of the higher income households screened out by this procedure will register food insecurity if administered the full module. If question HH1 is not needed for research purposes, a preferred strategy is to omit HH1 and administer Adult Stage 1 of the module to all households.

**(4) 30-Day Reference Period:** The questionnaire items may be modified to a 30-day reference period by changing the “last 12-month” references to “last 30 days.” In this case, items AD1a and AD5a must be changed to read as follows:

AD1a/AD5a. [IF YES ABOVE, ASK] In the last 30 days, how many days did this happen?

\_\_\_\_\_ days

[ ] DK